

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
EB-08 FAA-00 DOTE-00 /065 W
-----114683 071149Z /43

P R 070945Z OCT 77
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6616
INFO AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
CINCPAC
DIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DACCA 5798

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PONS MILI BG
SUBJ: IMPLICATIONS OF THE MUTINY

1. WE ARE NOW FIVE DAYS FROM THE EVENTS OF SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, WHEN
AIR FORCE AND SOME ARMY TROOPS MUTINIED IN DACCA AND A WEEK FROM THE
PRELIMINARY EVENT IN BOGRA. THE FOLLOWING ARE OUR VIEWS AT THIS TIME
OF
THE EFFECT OF THE MUTINY IN FIVE AREAS: INTERNATIONAL IMAGE, INTERNAL
SECURITY, MILITARY EFFICIENCY, MILITARY DISCIPLINE AND
DOMESTIC POLITICS.

2. INTERNATIONAL IMAGE: MOST BANGLADESHIS WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED
ARE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED THAT THEIR COUNTRY HAS LOOKED FOOLISH AND HAS
DONE SO WHEN THE EYES OF MUCH OF THE WORLD WERE FOCUSSED HERE AS THE
RESULT OF THE HIJACKING OF THE JAL AIRLINER. THEY FEAR THAT BANGLADES
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WILL BE SEEN AGAIN AS AN INTERNATIONAL BASKET CASE. IT IS A COUNTRY WHI
CH
HAS MADE EFFORTS WITH SOME SUCCESS TO CLIMB OUT OF THE MORASS OF
NATURAL DISASTERS, INADEQUATE FOOD SUPPLY AND RAPIDLY GROWING POP-
ULATION. NOW, HOWEVER, IT MAY ALSO APPEAR AS ONE WHICH CANNOT CONTROL
THE BASIC COERCIVE FORCE WHICH OUGHT TO BE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN THE

DOMESTIC STABILITY WHICH IS NECESSARY TO CONTINUE WHATEVER PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE. THESE PEOPLE EXPRESS ANXIETY THAT BOTH INTERNATIONAL DONOR AGENCIES AND POTENTIAL FOREIGN INVESTORS MAY SEE BANGLADESH AS IMMATURE AND UNDISCIPLINED TO THE DEGREE THAT AID FLOWS FROM DEVELOPMENT MAY BE CURTAILED (AND, PERHAPS, MORE CONCENTRATED ON FOOD RATHER THAN DEVELOPMENT) AND THAT INVESTMENT WILL BE CONSIDERED UNWISE BY THOSE WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN WILLING TO TAKE A RISK IN A MORE SETTLED BANGLADESH. WE MUST AGREE THAT THE ACTION WILL HARM THE INTERNATIONAL IMAGE OF BANGLADESH. AND ADD THAT THE ACTIONS TAKEN AND THE UNITY AT THE TOP DISPLAYED IN THE WEEKS FOLLOWING THE EVENT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER THE TARNISHING IS LONG TERM CORROSION OR IF THE EARLIER, SOMEWHAT OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK CAN BE RESTORED.

3. INTERNAL SECURITY: AS WE HAVE REPORTED EARLIER THERE ARE A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF SMALL ARMS STILL IN THE HANDS OF THE MUTINEERS OR THEIR ASSOCIATES. THERE ARE ALSO SOME MUTINEERS THEMSELVES NOT YET ROUNDED UP AND THESE ARE ASSUMED TO BE PREPARED TO RESIST CAPTURE SHOULD THEY BE LOCATED. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, REGULARLY SUBSTANTIAL QUANTITIES OF ARMS SCATTERED ILLEGALLY ABOUT THE COUNTRY SIDE, BUT THIS IS AN ADDITIONAL AMOUNT IN THE HANDS OF THOSE WHO RECENTLY HAVE MUTINIED. IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT THE INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM BROKE DOWN THUS CAUSING LESS ASSURANCE AMONG THE LEADERSHIP THAT THE

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INFORMATION FLOW TO THEM WILL BE EITHER TIMELY OR ACCURATE. MANY FEEL THAT THE SUNDAY EVENTS WERE NOT ALL THAT WAS PLANNED AND THAT A RENEWED ATTEMPT COULD BE IN THE OFFING. SEVERAL ARE WORRIED THAT THE EXAMPLE OF A SUCCESSFUL HOLDING OF HOSTAGES BY THE JRA COULD INSPIRE IMITATION BY DISGRUNTLED ELEMENTS HERE. THUS THE OVERALL PICTURE IS ONE OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH IS DEEPLY CONCERNED, A BIT ON EDGE AND (ONE

HOPE) ON GUARD. TIME AGAIN WILL BE THE TEST AS TO WHETHER OR NOT THIS ATTITUDE IS JUSTIFIED.

4. MILITARY EFFICIENCY: THE KILLING OF THE BAF OFFICERS HAS SERIOUSLY CRIPPLED THE FLYING ABILITY OF THE BAF AT A TIME WHEN NEW CHINESE SUPPLIED AIRCRAFT HAVE ARRIVED. (CHINESE TECHNICIANS WERE IN THE CANTONMENT WHEN THE MUTINY OCCURRED; THEY HAVE BEEN MOVED INTO THE PURBAN I HOTEL WHERE THEY WANDER AROUND UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE STAFF OR OTHERS.) THE GROUND CREWS HAVE ALSO BEEN DECIMATED AS THEY WERE THE BULK OF THE MUTINEERS. MANY ARE DEAD, OTHERS CAPTURED, A FEW FREE BUT HUNTED. OUR MILITARY SOURCES BELIEVE IT WILL BE A LONG TIME BEFORE

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY CAN BE REBUILT. THE OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE
MUTINY ALSO ARE TECHNICALLY TRAINED TROOPS: SIGNALS, MEDICAL AND
ORDANCE. OUR REPORTS STATE THAT MOST OF THESE ARE DEAD AND FEW ARMY
PERSONNEL ARE IN CUSTODY. WHILE THESE ARE THE CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF
MISSING PARTS OF A MILITARY MACHINE WHICH WAS NONE TOO EFFICIENT TO
BEGIN WITH, THERE ARE ALSO PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS WHICH ARE INEVITABLY
PRESENT. TO AN OFFICER, WHOSE CLASS WAS THE TARGET OF THE ATTACK,
IT WILL BE DIFFICULT AND UNCOMFORTABLE TO FACE SEPOYS WHOM HE MUST
THINK MAY HAVE SIMILAR DESIGNS AGAINST HIM PERSONALLY.

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EB-08 FAA-00 DOTE-00 /065 W
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5. MILITARY DISCIPLINE: MANY OF THOSE WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED SPEAK
OF THE LOSS OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THE INDIAN (AND PAKISTANI) ARMY
TRADITIONS WHICH ARE PART (BUT ONLY PART) OF THE HERITAGE OF THE BAN-

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LADESHI MILITARY. THEY NOTE THAT THE PRESENT BANGLADESHI ARMY IS NOT
DRAWN SOLELY FROM THE DISCIPLINED BACKGROUND OF THE SUB-CONTINENT BUT
HAS BEEN INFUSED WITH FREEDOM FIGHTERS AND OTHER GROUPS WHICH APPEARED

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DURING AND AFTER THE LIBERATION CONFLICT WITH PAKISTAN. THEY ALSO
NOTE THAT MANY OF THE OFFICERS IN THE PRESENT ARMY MUTINIED OR
DESERTED, IN EFFECT, AGAINST THE AUTHORITY THEY HAD PLEDGED TO SUPPORT
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IN 1971 (HOWEVER VALID THE REASONS ARE ADMITTED TO BE). THEY ALSO NOT
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THAT A GROUP OF MAJORS MURDERED THE LEGAL HEAD OF STATE (MUJIBUR RAHMAN) IN 1975 (AGAIN, HOWEVER TYRANNICAL AND CORRUPT HE HAD BECOME) AND WERE NOT PUNISHED FOR DOING SO. THUS, THESE LAMENT, THERE HAS BEEN
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NO DEVELOPMENT OF A STRONG SENSE OF DISCIPLINE WHICH IS ESSENTIAL FOR A MILITARY GROUP. AND, THEY ADD, THIS WAS NOT DONE ALTHOUGH THE ALMOST TWO YEARS OF A ZIA-DOMINATED REGIME HAS BEEN THE MOST PROGRESSIVE AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT IN BANGLADESH'S SHORT HISTORY. WE CAN CREDIT THESE VIEWS AND AGREE THAT EXEMPLARY PUNISHMENT OF THE MUTINEERS AND A MUCH GREATER EMPHASIS IN THE FUTURE ON DISCIPLINE ARE NEEDED IF SUCH EVENTS ARE NOT TO BECOME A RECURRING PATTERN IN THIS COUNTRY.

6. DOMESTIC POLITICS: NO DOUBT PARTLY LOOKING TO THEIR OWN SURVIVAL, ALMOST EVERY POLITICAL GROUPING IN THE COUNTRY HAS ISSUED STATEMENTS DEPLORING THE MUTINY, PLEDGING LOYALTY TO ZIA AND HIS REGIME, AND CALLING FOR ACTION AGAINST THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED. THE AWAMI LEAGUE HAS BELATEDLY JOINED THE CROWD BUT HAS AVOIDED ENDORSEMENT OF THE REGIME.

WE TAKE MUCH OF THIS TO BE PRO FORMA AS EACH PARTY, EVEN THE MINISCULE ONES, SURELY BELIEVES IT COULD DO A BETTER JOB THAN THE ZIA GOVERNMENT. WE HAVE HEARD SOME STATE THAT THEY BELIEVE ZIA SHOULD TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ASSOCIATE SOME POLITICAL LEADERS WITH HIS REGIME. (ZIA APPEARS TO BE READY TO GIVE COVERT SUPPORT TO A NEW POLITICAL PARTY ABOUT WHICH WE WILL REPORT EARLY NEXT WEEK.) THE DIFFICULTY HE FACES, HOWEVER, IS THAT SO FAR THE ONLY WELL ORGANIZED PARTY IS THE AWAMI LEAGUE WHICH WOULD NOT SUPPORT HIM AND WITH WHICH HE IS UNLIKELY TO ASSOCIATE. THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE JSD TO AN AS YET UNDETERMINED DEGREE IN THE MUTINY IS ASSUMED BY MOST PEOPLE. THERE IS A VIEW HELD BY MANY, HOWEVER, THAT THE JSD BY ATTACKING BRUTALLY A POPULAR REGIME HAS DAMAGED ITS OWN PROSPECTS AND MAY FIND ITS FOLLOWING DIMINISH. IF THIS BE SO, IT MAY BE ONE HAPPY PROSPECT IN AN OTHERWISE GLOOMY SITUATION.

7. WHILE THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT ON WHAT STEPS OUGHT TO BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION, THERE IS NOT WIDESPREAD ASSURANCE THAT
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THESE WILL IN FACT BE CARRIED OUT ON A TIMELY AND EFFECTIVE SCALE. ZIA IS SEEN AS A PERSON AROUND WHOM BANGLADESHIS CAN RALLY AND ONE WHOSE IDEAS FOR THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY ARE SOUND. HE IS NOT SEEN, HOWEVER, AS ONE WHO IS GIVEN TO THE QUICK AND DECISIVE ACTIONS WHICH ARE REQUIRED IN THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

HE HAS OFTEN SHOWN HESITANCY IN REACHING DECISIONS. HE HAS ALSO INVOLVED HIMSELF (AS HAVE OTHERS SUCH AS KHAN AND MANMOOD IN THE CIV

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ILIAN ARENA OF GOVERNMENT TO THE NEGLECT OF MILITARY DUTIES. THERE ARE

REPORTS OF DECREASING COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE SEPOYS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LADDER AND THE BRIGADIER AND MAJOR GENERAL LEVEL AT THE TOP. THERE MAY BE PRESSURE ON ZIA TO RELINQUISH THE POSITION OF CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF AS WELL AS TO DROP THE PORTFOLIOS WHICH HE HOLDS IN THE CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION AND TO CONCENTRATE ON HIS LEADERSHIP OF THE NATION AS PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. IN ANY EVENT, HESITANCY AND INDECISIVENESS IS NOT WHAT IS NEEDED TO BRING THE COUNTRY OUT OF A CRISIS SITUATION.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, MUTINY, MILITARY POLICIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Oct-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DACCA05798
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770366-0775
Format: TEL
From: DACCA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771084/aaaactoy.tel
Line Count: 238
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3861e634-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1001641
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: IMPLICATIONS OF THE MUTINY
TAGS: PINS, MILI, BG
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3861e634-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009